



## Looking the other way – Woodside and safety at the Otway Gas Plant construction site

June 2007

Since December 2006 the Justice and International Mission Unit has been in dialogue with Woodside Energy regarding serious allegations that employees at the Otway Gas Plant construction site in Port Campbell, Victoria, have been fired for raising safety concerns at the site, on suspicion they have raised safety concerns at the site and for union membership. After six months of attempted dialogue, the Justice and International Mission Unit is not satisfied that Woodside has taken the allegations seriously. The Unit is of the view that Woodside has not taken all reasonable steps to investigate the allegations to ensure that safety is being maintained to the highest possible standard at the Otway Gas Plant construction site.

The reason for the involvement on the issue of the Otway Gas Plant is that the Synod Funds Management holds shares in Woodside. The Synod ethical investment policy states that “The Church, in its worship and mission, including its investment policies and practices, seeks to bear witness to God’s love for that which God has created; to support that which enhances life and to resist that which diminishes life.” Further, the policy states “We seek to invest in companies which promote human welfare, dignity and respect, and for the general good.... Companies are also excluded [from Synod investing in them] where their practices are unacceptable in areas such as human rights, occupational health and safety and environmental management....”

The Otway Gas Plant construction site is being managed by Technip Oceania, who have been contracted for the task by Woodside.

Woodside had promised what the Unit believed would be an adequate level of response by the end of January 2007 and, despite two verbal promises that such a response was imminent, the Unit has not received what was promised at the time of writing.

### Two cases of concern

The Justice and International Mission Unit has followed two specific cases of employees alleging they were fired from the site over safety concerns.

In the first incident, it is alleged that a supervisor made an incident report stating that the Technip Oceania site manager had undertaken unsafe actions relating to pressure testing of a line. The supervisor alleged that he was then asked to falsify the incident report. He refused and was subsequently sacked. Woodside representatives told us verbally that WorkSafe had investigated the incident and found that the incident report was baseless. The Unit subsequently obtained copies of WorkSafe Victoria reports that relate to the site. WorkSafe Victoria issued a Prohibition Notice on Technip Oceania on 28 September 2006 with regard to pressure related activities such as hydrostatic testing or commissioning of pipe work at the Otway On Shore Gas Plant, which appears related to the very incident that the supervisor alleges that he was dismissed for reporting. Technip Oceania subsequently took the necessary corrective action. The supervisor stated to us that no representatives of Woodside had ever spoken to him.

The Unit also had followed up with the local congregation, Warrnambool Uniting, to get their view on the allegations being raised. Through them, the Unit was put in touch with a young employee of a subcontractor at the site who alleged he was sacked on suspicion that he reported a safety incident. The Unit wrote to Woodside regarding the allegations that this person raised. The Woodside representative the Unit had been speaking with told the Unit that Woodside would not speak with the sacked employee, even though he was happy to speak with them. The Unit’s conversations with the Woodside representative indicated that Woodside was not really sure why this former subcontractor employee was sacked, offering a couple of hypotheses. The Unit was

verbally told that Woodside would not take any action until the former subcontractor employee had exhausted all internal avenues of redress with Woodside's contractor Technip Oceania. The former subcontractor employee had exhausted the internal redress processes with Technip Oceania. The Unit was then informed Woodside would only consider becoming involved in the case if the former subcontractor employee took legal action against his former employer. The young employee who had been fired has indicated his concern about the costs involved in taking legal action and what impact it may have on his future employment prospects within the industry.

The Unit is deeply concerned that in both cases Woodside has refused to speak with the employees who allege to have been fired in relation to the reporting of safety incidents. The Unit believes that this is in contrast to Woodside's statement in correspondence to the Synod dated 15 May 2007 that "to the fullest extent that is available to Woodside we have been categorically assured by Technip's site management, which is responsible for all staffing and manning levels at the construction site, that they did not dismiss a worker for refusing to falsify a report nor did they dismiss a worker on the basis of holding union membership."

### **Woodside's policies**

Woodside policy states that it ensures that contractors and subcontractors will maintain safety standards that Woodside would impose for its own operations. Further, Woodside policy states that it will protect whistle blowers. The Justice and International Mission Unit has assumed this should apply to employees of contractors and subcontractors that report safety incidents.

Woodside has good safety policies and procedures on paper for the Otway Gas Plant Construction site with a detailed 'Otway Gas Plant Construction Safety Management Plan' and the site safety procedures. The Safety Management Plan and site safety procedures, as given on paper, demonstrate that appropriate safety policies exist on the site, but in themselves does not provide proof that these systems are being complied with or that allegations that employees are targeted for dismissal if they raise safety issues on site are false and without foundation.

### **What you can do**

Write polite and respectful letters to:

Don Voelte  
Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer  
Woodside Energy Ltd  
Box D188 G.P.O.  
Perth, Western Australia, 6840

Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern at allegations that employees at the Otway Gas Plant construction site have been fired for reporting safety incidents or on suspicion they have raised safety incidents.
- Express disappointment that Woodside has refused to speak with those who allege that they were fired for these reasons. State that you believe that Woodside is failing to live up to its policies in relation to safety and of protecting whistleblowers.
- Point out that if the allegations being raised are true, then the dismissal of employees for raising safety incidents or on suspicion that safety incidents have been made would undoubtedly intimidate staff on site into not reporting safety incidents, increasing the risk of a serious accident on site despite the safety policies and procedures that exist on site.
- Ask that Woodside take immediate action to thoroughly investigate allegations of employees being fired from the Otway Gas Plant construction site for reporting safety incidents, including by speaking directly to those employees who claim that this has happened to them.